Who Should Lead?

Read how different views of leadership developed in early Islam.

SS24.8.3b "Differentiate among the Islamic sects that developed after the death of Muhammad."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each group's view of who could lead, circle each source of religious authority, and number the events that show when the groups emerged. Use your marks to compare the groups.

A Question of Leadership

1. In 632, Muhammad died without leaving a successor accepted by all Muslims. The growing community needed a leader, called a caliph, to handle public affairs. Many Muslims accepted Abu Bakr, a close companion of Muhammad, as the first caliph. Over time, those who accepted the first caliphs became known as Sunni Muslims. Sunnis favored consultation in choosing a leader. They looked to the Quran, Muhammad's example, and learned scholars for religious guidance. A caliph led the community, but Sunnis did not consider him an imam with a unique, inherited right to interpret the faith.

2. Other Muslims believed that Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law Ali should have led the community after Muhammad's death. This group became known as Shia Muslims, from a name meaning "party of Ali." Shia Muslims held that Ali and leaders from his family, called imams, had a special claim to guide the community. For them, an imam carried religious authority as well as a claim to leadership. Different Shia groups later disagreed about which descendants of Ali were rightful imams. Ali eventually became the fourth caliph, but Abu Bakr's selection remained disputed.

3. A third movement emerged years later during a conflict over Ali's rule. In 657, Ali agreed to arbitration, a process in which people try to settle a dispute. Some of his supporters rejected that decision and broke away. They became known as Kharijites. They argued that any morally upright Muslim could lead, regardless of family background, and that a leader who seriously violated their understanding of God's law could be removed. Unlike Shia Muslims, they did not reserve leadership for Ali's family. Unlike Sunnis, they rejected Ali after he agreed to arbitration.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Sunni and Shia views differ over who should have led after Muhammad died?

2. Ali later became caliph. How did Shia Muslims and the Kharijites differ in their views of his leadership?

3. How did Sunni and Kharijite views differ on choosing or removing a leader?

4. How did the Shia view of an imam's religious authority differ from the Sunni view of a caliph?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence museum audio script for visitors, not a list of definitions. Explain how views of leadership differed among Sunnis, Shia Muslims, and Kharijites, and show why the Kharijite movement arose later.

ANSWER KEY

Who Should Lead?

GRADE 8 · SS24.8.3b

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each group's view of who could lead, circle each source of religious authority, and number the events that show when the groups emerged. Use your marks to compare the groups. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Sunni and Shia views differ over who should have led after Muhammad died?	**Sunnis accepted Abu Bakr as the first caliph and favored consultation in choosing a leader. Shia Muslims believed Ali should have led and that his family had a special claim.**
2	Ali later became caliph. How did Shia Muslims and the Kharijites differ in their views of his leadership?	**Shia Muslims held that Ali and leaders from his family had a special claim to guide the community. Kharijites broke away after Ali agreed to arbitration and did not reserve leadership for his family.**
3	How did Sunni and Kharijite views differ on choosing or removing a leader?	**Sunnis favored consultation in choosing a leader. Kharijites argued that any morally upright Muslim could lead and that a leader who seriously violated God's law could be removed.**
4	How did the Shia view of an imam's religious authority differ from the Sunni view of a caliph?	**Shia Muslims held that imams from Ali's family had special religious authority. Sunnis did not give a caliph a unique, inherited right to interpret the faith.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

After Muhammad died, Muslims disagreed over who had the strongest claim to lead. Sunnis accepted Abu Bakr and favored consultation, while Shia Muslims believed Ali and his family held a special claim to leadership and religious guidance. Ali later became caliph, but some supporters broke away when he agreed to arbitration during a conflict. These Kharijites argued that any upright Muslim could lead and that a leader who violated God's law could be removed.

Accept accurate paraphrases that distinguish each group's position. Students should not describe the Kharijites as a group that formed immediately after Muhammad's death.